

Titusville's TICO Airport looks to expand

Grant, loan would enable helicopter school to grow

BY AMANDA STRATFORD • FLORIDA TODAY • March 3, 2010

TITUSVILLE — Titusville — Cocoa (TICO) Airport officials expect to find out this month whether they will receive a \$2 million grant that would allow the world's largest civilian helicopter school to grow even larger.

The grant, coupled with an \$11 million loan from the school's parent company Bristow Group Inc, could lead to the largest expansion at the Space Coast Regional Airport in more than 10 years.

The project could create up to 97 additional staff positions at Bristow Academy.

"There is nothing more important at this moment in this area than the creation of jobs, and this will expand beyond just the jobs created specifically within Bristow," said Congresswoman Suzanne Kosmas, D-New Smyrna Beach, who worked with TICO officials to apply for the Economic Development Administration grant.

The plans for Bristow Academy are just the latest in a string of expansion announcements at the airport.

Last month, airport officials broke ground on a new administration building and a 20,000-square-foot display hangar to house Vietnam-era warplanes at the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum.

The airport also recently purchased 56 acres from the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program that will be used for a runway expansion and other safety improvements. And TICO officials leased 75 acres to the space-themed entertainment group Space Center LLC.

"There are lots of opportunities and almost unlimited potential here," said TICO Executive Director Michael Powell about the 2,000 acres of airport property that still remains largely undeveloped.

Powell said he envisions the TICO airport property becoming a destination where tourists could spend a day or two

exploring attractions like the Valiant Air Command Warbird Museum and Interspace, a space-themed entertainment and research facility that would include the world's largest simulated Mars surface environment.

Powell also is speaking to other groups, like the Space Walk of Fame Museum and Knight's Armament Company, about the possibility of creating museums on airport property.

"We could have the past present and future in one location. Likeminded groups could overlap and play into each other's potential," he said. "And it would be specific to this community. We'd be educating people on this area. It's exciting."

Bristow Academy, which has been in Titusville since 2000, trains helicopter pilots from around the world. In a typical year, the academy trains about 265 pilots, but that number could grow by 100 or more.

The young pilots -- some sporting aviator sunglasses and others in military uniforms -- hustle about and tank in different languages as they schedule their training assignments. Most are from "well-to-do" families in other countries who move to Titusville for a year or longer.

Sean Ferry, 18, of Scotland moved to Titusville last September to gain experience for a job transporting crews to and from oil rigs in the North Sea. He bought a car and rented an apartment. He shops and dines in Titusville and spends his weekends in Cocoa Beach.

"My dad was a helicopter pilot, so through him I built up the will and want to do this," said Ferry. "My visa expires in 2011, but up until that point I'll be working hard and logging as many hours as I can."

Nick Mayhew, general manager of the Bristow Academy Titusville campus, said the school pumps more than \$100 million each year into the local economy.

"We are not re-circulating local dollars, we are bringing new money into Brevard and Florida," Mayhew said. "This organization has grown relatively quietly over the years, but we have really become a major player with our physical and economic presence in the community."